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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 000131

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MAAR](#) [NL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/ISAF: PARLIAMENTARY TRIP CANCELED;
LABOR PARTY SHIFTING (SLOWLY)

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Chat Blakeman,
reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Dutch parliament on January 18 called off a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan citing security concerns and time constraints. The decision is not expected to have a significant impact on the upcoming debate on Dutch participation in ISAF III. The opposition Labor Party (PvdA) continues to raise questions about the proposed mission, but support for the mission within the party appears to be growing. PvdA Faction Leader Wouter Bos told Charge January 19 that the PvdA is not yet -- but could be -- "convinced" to support the mission.

Parliamentary Trip Canceled

¶2. (C) MFA Deputy Head for Conflict Prevention Joop Nijssen told Polmiloff January 19 that Parliament opted to cancel the proposed fact-finding trip to Afghanistan because it would have "little added value" in the upcoming parliamentary debate. Nijssen said the MFA and MOD had arranged a whirlwind schedule involving one day in Kabul and another in Kandahar, and were prepared to fly interlocutors from Uruzgan to discuss the security situation. Nijssen said several parliamentarians insisted on physically visiting Uruzgan, to which the GONL declined due to "logistical problems." Nijssen acknowledged the MFA was "not particularly upset" the trip had been canceled; security concerns played a key role in turning down the request to visit Uruzgan.

¶3. (C) Parliament hopes to invite experts from NATO and Afghanistan to participate in the January 30 hearing, thereby obviating the need for the trip. Moreover, parliamentarians could use the additional time to prepare for the debate, Nijssen said. Several parliamentarians -- including Labor Party (PvdA) spokesman Koenders and CDA spokesman Ormel -- said during a January 17 dinner that they were not enthused about a trip unless they could visit Uruzgan, and were confident they could receive the requisite information during the hearing to make an informed decision.

Support Building in PvdA

¶4. (C) Several members of the opposition Labor Party (PvdA) have expressed their willingness -- with caveats -- to support the ISAF III mission. In an interview with the left-of-center Amsterdam daily newspaper "Parool" on January

18, Michiel van Hulten (the newly elected party chairman) described the ISAF III deployment as "the kind of mission that the PvdA supports" but cautioned that questions remain about whether the significant reconstruction would be achievable given the security situation and the degree of separation between ISAF and OEF. According to van Hulten, the PvdA "will gladly go if the mission is sound."

¶5. (C) In a meeting with Polcouns on January 18, PvdA Defense Spokesman Frans Timmermans assessed that support for the mission within active PvdA membership currently stood at about 80 percent. (Note: This is much higher than we have heard from other sources. End note.) Timmermans stressed that this support was fragile, and could quickly evaporate if it appeared that the Dutch would not be able to conduct significant reconstruction work in Uruzgan and/or if the mission could not be disentangled from OEF. While many in the party, including those in the "traditional left," could support the deployment on moral and humanitarian grounds, some also saw the current debate as an opportunity to embarrass and possibly bring down the current government and would argue against the deployment for that reason. Timmermans added that PvdA Parliamentary Faction Leader Wouter Bos had not yet made up his mind on the issue; once he did, the rest of the party would fall in line.

¶6. (C) Charge and Polcouns met with Wouter Bos and Koenders on January 19. After hearing Charge's arguments in favor of the Dutch deployment, Bos expressed sympathy for the principles of the mission and noted that there was significant support for it within the party. The PvdA, however, would not rush to make a decision until all views had been aired and questions answered. Bos described himself as "not yet convinced" about the mission but did not rule out possible PvdA support. Koenders also expressed support for

the principles of the mission, but reiterated the PvdA's concerns about keeping OEF and ISAF operations distinct.

Comment

¶7. (C) PvdA has played the Stage III question cautiously, but continues to keep an open mind. While the news of their possible receptivity to the mission is encouraging, PvdA is not yet sold and we still expect an uphill battle in Parliament.

BLAKEMAN